

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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C O N F I D E N T I A L NEW DELHI 10594

FOLLOWING REPEAT CALCUTTA 1797 SENT ACTION NEW DELHI

INFO BOMBAY/MADRAS DTD 05 AUG 75

QUOTE:

CALCUTTA 1797

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, IN

SUBJ: SITUATION IN BIHAR. 1. I WAS IN PATNA AUGUST 4 FOR CALLS ON GOVERNOR BHANDARE, CHIEF MINISTER MISHRA, AND CHIEF SECRETARY SARAN SINGH. THE FOLLOWING SUMMARIZES THEIR REMARKS ON MAJOR TOPICS.

2. FLOODS: THEY WERE EVERYBODY'S MAIN CONCERN. THE AREA IN WHICH THERE IS CURRENTLY FLOODING IS THAT JUST SOUTH OF NEPAL

ALONG RIVERS RUNNING DOWN FROM NEPAL. THE BURHI GANDHAK HAS BURST ITS EMBANKMENT NEAR MUZAFFARPUR FLOODING THE AREA NEAR THAT CITY AND ISOLATING THE CITY ITSELF. OTHER STREAMS IN THE SAME AREA HAVE GONE OVER THEIR BANKS, BUT FOR THE TIME BEING AT

LEAST THE GANGES AND GANDE ARE WITHIN SAFE LEVELS.

CHIEF MINISTER MISHRA RATHER DRAMATICALLY DECLARED THAT TEN MILLION PERSONS ARE AFFECTED BY THE FLOODS AND THAT HE IS APPEALING TO THE

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GOI AND TO QTE INTERNATIONAL BODIES UNQTE FOR ASSISTANCE; MISHRA

ADDED THAT CROPS IN THE FLOODED AREAS HAVE BEEN DESTROYED AND WILL HAVE TO BE REPLANTED. CHIEF SECRETARY SINGH ESTIMATED THE NUMBER AFFECTED AT ABOUT FIVE MILLION AND SAID THAT IF THE WATER RECEDES SOON AND SUN COMES OUT THE RICE CROP WILL SURVIVE AND REPLANTING WILL NOT BE NECESSARY. WHILE MORE CONSERVATIVE IN HIS ESTIMATES THAN MISHRA, SINGH DID MAKE CLEAR THAT THE FLOODS ARE SERIOUS AND SOME AREAS THE WORST IN TWENTY YEARS. HE SAID THE INDIAN AIR FORCE HAS BEEN CALLED IN TO HELP REMOVE STRANDED AND DELIVER FOOD.

3. FOOD SITUATION: THE CHIEF MINISTER SAID THE FOOD SITUATION IS GOOD AND THE FLOODS WILL NOT CAUSE A FOOD PROBLEM THIS YEAR AT LEAST. CHIEF SECRETARY SINGH CONFIRMED THIS, EXPLAINING THAT IN ADDITION TO STOCKS MADE AVAILABLE IN THE GOI, THE GOVERNMENT OF BIHAR HAS BUILT UP GRAIN STOCKS OF ITS OWN OF SOME 60,000 TONS WHICH WILL CARRY IT THROUGH WELL INTO 1976 EVEN IN THE WORST OF CIRCUMSTANCES. SINGH SAID THAT IF NECESSARY THE GOB WILL USE THESE STOCKS TO KEEP PRICES DOWN BUT SO FAR THE PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECT OF THE EMERGENCY HAS BEEN ENOUGH TO DO THE JOB.

4. LAND REFORM: CHIEF MINISTER MISHRA REACTED WITH A VERY EVIDENT LACK OF ENTHUSIASM WHEN I ASKED HOW LAND DISTRIBUTION WAS GOING IN BIHAR. YES, WE DO HAVE A PROGRAM, HE SAID, AND HOPE TO DISTRIBUTE 50,000 ACRES BY THE END OF THE YEAR, BUT RIGHT NOW WE CAN'T THINK OF ANYTHING BUT THE FLOODS. SINGH CONFIRMED MISHRA'S FIGURE BUT ACKNOWLEDGED THAT THIS REPRESENTS ONLY A VERY SMALL BEGINNING TOWARD ALLEVIATION OF THE PROBLEM OF THE LANDLESS, WHO IN BIHAR ACCOUNT FOR MORE THAN 40 PERCENT OF THE POPULATION. SINGH SAID A LAND REFORM LEGISLATION HAD BEEN PASSED IN 1962 BUT WAS NEVER IMPLEMENTED AND COULD NOT NOW BE DONE ALL OF A SUDDEN. GOB HE SAID IS CURRENTLY MAKING A CENSUS OF EXCESS LAND HOLDINGS; THIS WILL HAVE TO BE DISTRIBUTION OF THE 50,000 ACRES NOW IN PROCESS. AFTER THE CENSUS IS COMPLETED THE LANDOWNERS WILL BE ALLOWED TO CHOOSE THE ACREAGE THEY WISH TO KEEP AND THE REST ABOVE THE CEILING WILL BE DISTRIBUTED TO THE LANDLESS. SINGH SAID IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO GUESS WITH ANY PRECISION RIGHT NOW HOW MUCH THIS MIGHT BE; IT COULD RUN ANYWHERE FROM 100,00 TO 500,000. COMMENT: MISHRA IS A LARGE LANDOWNER AND THE LANDOWNING CLASSES ARE APPARENTLY EVEN MORE THE MAINSTAY OF THE CONGRESS IN BIHAR THAN ELSEWHERE. FROM MISHRA'S AND SINGH'S REMARKS IT DOESN'T LOOK AS THOUGH THERE

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IS MUCH PROSPECT OF RAPID PROGRESS ON PROBLEM OF LANDLESS.

5. THE EMERGENCY: THE PEOPLE BELIEVE THE EMERGENCY, MISHRA SAID, THEY HAVE TOLD ME SO THEMSELVES. NOW THERE IS DISCIPLINE, HE SAID, ADDING IN THE SAME BREATH THAT THE PROBLEM OF THE LAXALITES HAS BEEN RESOLVED TOO. GOVERNOR BHANDARE SAID THAT THINGS HAVE BEEN VERY QUIET IN BIHAR SINCE THE EMERGENCY, WITH PRACTICALLY

NO AGITATION OR PROTEST. ONLY ABOUT 1500 PERSONS HAVE BEEN ARRESTED, THE GOVERNOR SAID, AND THIS NUMBER IS SMALL IN VIEW OF THE TROUBLES THAT BIHAR EXPERIENCED PREVIOUSLY. THE GOVERNOR'S EXPLANATION WAS THAT THE JP NARAYAN MOVEMENT HAD LOST STEAM WELL BEFORE THE EMERGENCY AND HIS ARREST; JP'S TROOPS HAD GOTTEN OUT OF HAND AND RESORTED TO VIOLENCE, AND THE PUBLIC HAD REACTED NEGATIVELY TO THIS. WHEN JP AND THE OTHER LEADERS OF THE MOVEMENT WERE ARRESTED THE FOLLOWS HAD NO ENTHUSIASM FOR CONTINUING AND SO DISBANDED. CHIEF SECRETARY SINGH SPOKE OF THE EMERGENCY IN GLOWING TERMS; IT HAD BROUGHT AN END TO PERMISSIVENESS, NOW THERE IS DISCIPLINE AND WORK CAN BE DONE. SINGH SAID THE SITUATION IN BIHAR HAD BEGUN TO IMPROVE FROM THE BEGINNING OF JANUARY OF THIS YEAR, SO MUCH SO THAT IT WAS POSSIBLE TO REMOVE THE BARRICADES IN THE SPRING. FOR THE LAST TWO MONTHS OR SO THERE HAS BEEN COMPLETE CALM. STUDENTS ARE BACK AT THE UNIVERSITIES IN LARGE NUMBER AND ARE STUDYING NOT AGITATING. YES, SINGH SAID, THE NAXALITES HAVE BEEN ELIMINATED IN BIHAR. THERE WERE, HE SAID, FAIRLY LARGE CLASHES BETWEEN NAXALITES AND POLICE AND MILITARY FORCES IN MAY AND JUNE BUT THE TWO BANDS IN QUESTION HAD BEEN DESTROYED AND HE IS CONFIDENT THAT BIHAR IS NOW FREE OF NAXALITES. THE TWO BANDS WERE COMPOSED OF OUTSIDERS, SINGH SAID, NOT LOCALS.

6. GENERAL ESTIMATE: SINGH SAID HE BELIEVES BIHAR IS NOW QTE OUT OF THE WOODS AND INTO A TAKE-OFF UNQTE. IT HAS SOLVED ITS FOOD PROBLEM. HAS RESTORED LAW AND ORDER, AND BARRING NATURAL DISASTER CAN LOOK FORWARD TO BETTER TIMES AHEAD.

7. PERSONALITY NOTES: MISHRA, THOUGH NOT UNFRIENDLY, WAS A MAN OF FEW WORDS AND NO SMALL TALK AT ALL. THE CONVERSATION WAS FURTHER DAMPENED BY THE FACT THAT WHILE IT TOOK PLACE IN ENGLISH NEITHER OF US VERY WELL UNDERSTOOD THE VARIETY SPOKEN BY THE OTHER (FORTUNATELY MISHRA WAS ILL AND WAS TO GO HOME TO BED IMMEDIATELY
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AFTERWARDS. MY IMPRESSION WAS OF MAN OF RATHER LIMITED HORIZONS. GOVERNOR BHANDARE WAS GRACIOUS GENTLE VERY FRIENDLY, AND WENT OUT OF HIS WAY TO CRITICISE COMMUNISTS AND THEIR SYMPATHIZERS. I KNEW THAT HE IS AN UNTOUCHABLE ALTHOUGH CONCERNED OVER UPLIFTING HIS PEOPLE AND HAS HAD SOME FRICTION WITH THE GOB ON THIS; WHEN I ASKED IF PROGRESS WAS BEING MADE IN IMPROVING THE LOT OF THE SCHEDULED CASTES IN BIHAR HE SAID YES BUT IT IS VERY SLOW, MUCH TOO SLOW, SINGH IS A LIVELY, VOLUBLE SIKH, VERY OPEN AND FRIENDLY AND READY TO TALK EVEN ABOUT DELICATE SUBJECTS BUT OF COURSE AS HIS POSITION REQUIRES VERY MUCH ALONG THE OFFICIAL LINE. HIS OPTIMISM ABOUT THE SITUATION IN BIHAR SEEMED GENUINE, JUST AS GENUINE AS HIS BUREAUCRAT'S DELIGHT OVER THE FREE HAND THE EMERGENCY AFFORDS HIM NOW.
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